

A healthier Thanksgiving

By **Jodi Schneider**
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The average American can consume thousands of calories at Thanksgiving dinner. It's far too easy to overload on your favorite comfort foods like buttery mashed potatoes and gravy, loads of stuffing and pumpkin pie.

No one ever said Thanksgiving dinner was healthy — but there are certain tricks to make it a little healthier, and avoid riding out the food coma on the couch for the rest of the night.

Whether you're doling out your own portions or you're at the mercy of your family member passing out plates piled high with "a little bit of everything," knowing which foods you should be eating more of — and which you should only enjoy a few bites of — will help you make the best possible choices this Thanksgiving.

Planning a healthy Thanksgiving menu doesn't mean the food has to be bland and boring. In fact, think of Thanksgiving as the perfect excuse to pile your plate high with your favorite nutritious vegetables — brussels sprouts, green beans, sweet potatoes, and more.

Even though a Thanksgiving meal is inevitably going to be higher in fat, calories, and sodium, you can minimize the damage by mixing in some healthier items.

In fact, you could create a grain-free stuffing using root vegetables and a little ground sausage for a delicious healthier side dish (*see recipe*).

One way to slow yourself down eating too much turkey and all the fixings is to pour yourself a bowl of seasonal vegetable soup, suggests Katherine Tallmadge, RD, author of "Diet Simple: 195 Mental Tricks, Substitutions,

Habits & Inspirations." She recommends a butternut squash soup, or a broccoli and carrot soup with potatoes and thyme. Research has shown having a healthy appetizer beforehand may reduce the number of calories you consume at your main meal.

When planning Thanksgiving appetizers, prepare lighter foods that won't tempt guests to overeat before the big meal. Serving bite-sized savory tarts, creamy Greek yogurt-based dips, and hummus would all be safe bets.

During the main meal try filling up 50 percent of your plate with non-starchy veggies. This may include Brussels sprouts, green beans, carrots, bell peppers or a green salad, says Lori Zanini, RD, spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Stick with smaller portions of starchy veggies, such as corn, potatoes, green peas and winter squashes. Try to balance your plate as much as possible without depriving yourself.

The turkey itself is relatively low in calories if you stick to skinless white meat, so most nutritionists don't mind if you eat a little more than the recommended 3 ounces of protein.

"I have certainly seen individuals pile their plates with more than three times the appropriate portion size on Thanksgiving Day," says Zanini.

You might think you're eating healthier if you bypassed the stuffing and gravy, but if you munched on cheese and crackers all day while cooking, know that those calories add up as well. If you get hungry while you're cooking, snack on raw veggies and hummus or fruit.

Drinks count, too. Many of us have large wine goblets and beer mugs and don't

even know what a proper serving looks like in those glasses. Using a measuring cup if you need to, pour five ounces of wine into a glass so you know the line that marks one serving.

Don't waste your calories on everyday foods like chips, rolls and mashed potatoes. Eat foods that you love and that aren't available at other times of the year, like homemade cranberry sauce, specialty sides, and pumpkin pie.

Pie is as iconic a part of the holiday menu as the turkey itself. Most nine-inch pies are meant to be cut into eight slices. If your pie is only sliced into six pieces, your portions are probably too large. One trick if you're trying to cut back: If there's only one type of pie to choose from, you'll probably stick to one slice. Don't feel like additional ice cream or whipped topping is a requirement, but if you are going to finish a slice off with some, keep it to a golf-ball-sized amount.

Savory grain-free stuffing

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| 3 medium turnips | 1 tsp. salt |
| 2 large sweet potatoes | 1 lb. sage pork sausage (opt.) |
| 1 TBSP dried sage | 3 large shallots |
| 1 tsp. dried rosemary | 3 large ribs of celery |
| 1 tsp. dried thyme | 4 oz. fresh button mushrooms |
| 1 tsp. dried oregano | 1 small apple |
| 1 tsp. turmeric | 1/4 cup olive oil |
| 1 tsp. black pepper | for cooking |

Preheat oven to 375 degrees F. Peel turnips and sweet potatoes and cut into 1/2 inch cubes. Grease two large baking sheets with oil and evenly spread the turnips and sweet potatoes in them. Sprinkle with some of the sage, rosemary, thyme, oregano, turmeric, pepper and salt and toss with your hands. Put into oven and bake for about an hour until they are soft and starting to brown, tossing a few times to brown evenly.

While the turnips and sweet potatoes are cooking, brown the sausage if you are using it. When sausage is cooked, remove from pan, leaving drippings. While the sausage is cooking, finely dice the shallots and celery. Add the shallots and celery to the pan once the sausage has cooked. You might need to add more oil. Dice the mushrooms and peel and dice the apple. Add the mushrooms and apple to the pan once the onions and celery have started to soften. Continue cooking until all are cooked.

Return sausage to the pan and add more of the above spices to your taste. Remove from heat.

Once turnips and sweet potatoes are done, mix with the sausage/onion/celery/apple/mushroom mixture and continue mixing until well incorporated and starting to clump together.

Transfer to a greased 9x13 baking dish and warm in oven if serving immediately or put in refrigerator, covered, if using later.



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